

SUMMER 2016

home design real estate



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SUMMER 2016

Bloom, Build, Bask

Next week an ardent Burlington B&B owner plans to play all day in a Williston tree house. In Fairfax we geek out over willows with horticulturist Michael Dodge and get our craft on making cinnamon candies because...incapacitated.

We say goodbye to one House Hunter and congratulate another. Meanwhile we wonder what all of Vermont will have broadband access. So do Realtors and home buyers!

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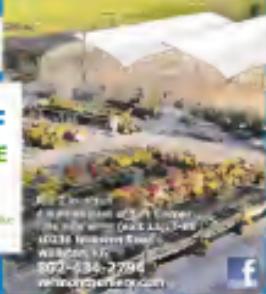
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Room in the INN

A Burlington B&B artfully mixes old and new

BY RACHEL ELIZABETH JONES



A regal Victorian facade and twin gargoyle-like door knockers greet guests at MADE INN Vermont, but the imposing exterior only hints at what awaits inside. Since proprietress Linda Wolf opened the eclectic bed-and-breakfast in August 2012, it's become a notable destination for Queen City visitors seeking both elegance and funk.

"We consider this estate an a work of art," Wolf says, leading a reporter through the giant, refurbished house on South Willard Street. The B&B, Wolf notes, was originally the idea of her daughter, Brooklyn-based artist and jewelry designer Shelly Woerther. The two worked together to bring their vision to reality, beginning with their purchase of the building in 2006.

Built in 1881 as the residence of a granite excavator, the house retains many of its original features, from carved entryways and fireplaces, thick banisters to paneling and wooden beams. According to Wolf, a medium who once stayed there alleged that the mansion has also retained the ghostly presence of the excavator's wife, Blanche. "I've not personally met her," Wolf says wryly.

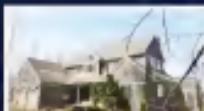
As the medium suggests, an abundance of local finds are woven into its expert decor. An industrial-style light fixture from Constant Metal & Light illuminates the entryway and antique claw-foot tubs were salvaged from the RE SOURCE Building Materials Store. Wolf proudly points out a "fabulously mismatched" original bathroom set, sourced from the Architectural Salvage Warehouse in Essex Junction. Several of the inn's antiques were upholstered with fabric from Johnson Woolens Mills.

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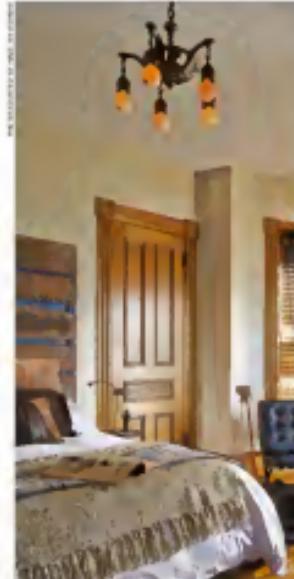
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Room in the INN

Visitors may find themselves drawn into the common space as if by magnetic pull; the room is a visual treasure trove. A revamped Queen Anne-style table with a concrete-FBI top offers a broad selection of coffee-table books, so does the built-in library opposite. In fact, art- and design-themed books and magazines are plentiful throughout the entire house.

"I seem to have a collecting thing," Wolf admits. "I see so much potential in everything I pick up."

The treasures she employs to decor include vintage plates, a Pletzelberg-engraved portable light oven that works as if by magic, porcelain dolls, and foam wig forms. Original artwork includes a tabletop figurative sculpture by Vuorinen and many striking, graphic paintings by LA and Montreal partner David Hinshaw.

The large common area gives way to a cozy kitchen fully stocked with goodies, including special Vermont treats such as Heady Topper and Frost Ranger for adult guests. The kitchen's back door opens onto an enclosed patio and hot tub.

The building's second story houses the Inn's four high-ceilinged guest

rooms, each with its own character and charm. A private bathroom is down the hall. Guests in Room 904 can take in the colorful strands of past guests on the chalkboard wall, perhaps while seated on the Bonnes chairs. Rock music has its own turntable and LP collection. The record player niche in Room 903 is serenely "tiled" with Alhambra ceramics.

Climbing up the carpeted staircase past the living quarters is the master's enclosed window's watch, settop, the ms. Wix's cherry. With a million-dollar view of downtown and Lake Champlain, the small residence is equipped with chairs, a tabletop checkers setup, telescope and binoculars — should a guest care to bird-watch or get their River Watch-on.

"We're very relaxed, we're very authentic, we have a youthful design — we're very Burlington," says Wolf.

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT...

- Room 105
- A vintage arrangement in Room 902
- Room 903
- Room 904

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nest

Need for Speed



How does broadband access affect real estate property values?

BY KEN PICARD

Meg Streeter of Wilmington is a lifelong Vermonter and real estate agent who works predominantly in Windham County's residential market. After 32 years in the business, she has a pretty good idea of what it takes to sell a home in her area. These days, that includes high-speed internet service.

"In the last five to eight years, it's become a must-have," says Streeter, whose territory includes Wilmington and Dover, where 94 percent of the real estate transactions involve vacation homes bought by out-of-state residents. "It's the rare person who's coming here to get away from it all," she adds. "They don't really want to be that away from it all."

Until about five years ago, many home appraisals and building inspections didn't even mention internet connectivity, says Isaac Chaves, CEO of Vermont Realtors, the 1,700-member real estate trade organization.

Today, Realtors routinely use a form called the Seller's Property Information Report. The one-page document asks sellers to disclose virtually every feature of the property, from the number of bathrooms and bedrooms to the type of foundation, roof, septic system and appliances. It also includes a "telephone/internet/tv" section that asks whether internet service is available on the premises and, if so, what kind—dial-up, broadband, cable, satellite and/or DSL. That info gets entered in the broker's multiple listing system, or MLS, so buyers can weed out houses that lack the features they want.

Chaves says it's common for prospective buyers to tell their agent what they're looking for, say, a three-bedroom home in Newport in the \$300,000 to \$200,000 price range, but for the agent then to only show them houses with broadband access. "If a house doesn't have it, he says, 'the buyer never sees it.'

"Associated with it, there's all the time that people pass up houses [without broadband availability]," he says, "but I don't have any way to quantify that."

Vermonters have long demanded the digital divide that separates residents of the state's more populated areas—namely, Chittenden County, where broadband coverage is widely available from

multiple providers—from their more remote counterparts. Those in the real estate business say that, depending on a property's location, broadband access can make or break the deal. Though Streeter can't put a dollar figure on the value of high-speed internet, she says, "basically, if the house doesn't have it, in my opinion, it is unlikely to sell."

Streeter isn't alone in that observation. Rep. Laura Silcox (D-Winooski) represents the towns of Dover, Windham, Brattleboro, St. Johnsbury, Swanton, Somersett and part of Westminster. A review of the Vermont Department of Public Service's most current statewide map of broadband availability, released in April, reveals that much of Vermont's southern Vermont district is stuck on the wrong side of the digital divide.

VTEL, the Springfield-based telecom company that received a \$1 million state grant in 2012 to provide wireless broadband to underserved areas in Bennington, Rutland, Windham and Windsor counties, has yet to deliver on that promise, Silcox says.

Consider Rutland, she goes on, located along the Massachusetts border. It was once a thriving community that housed workers from a local chlor-alkali factory, the Yankee Rowe nuclear power

plant and Westfield Paper Company's glassine factory just across the state line. When all three employers closed (in the 1980s and '90s), some 300 to 400 jobs disappeared.

Seliff's reality acknowledges that the lack of broadband in Rutland isn't the only obstacle to economic recovery. But its absence makes it even more difficult to attract home buyers and new businesses.

"Kids can't do their homework because the service has not been built up from the school," she says. "People are literally abandoning their homes that have been on the market for years and they can't sell."

The Federal Communications Commission now defines broadband as internet speeds of at least 4 megabits per second (Mbps) downstream and 1 Mbps upstream — 4/1 for short. According to Jim Poore, director of telecommunications and connectivity at the Department of Public Service, of the 300,000 addresses in Vermont, 71 percent have access to broadband speeds of 25/3 or higher. "Frankly, broadband is more important to people today than water service," he says.

To date, no one has quantified the relationship between Vermont real estate prices and broadband. Anecdotally, however, the differences are obvious to those who handle real estate deals in areas where one community has access and a neighboring one does not.

Seliff cites the example of Windham, which sits between Mt. Mansfield Mountain and Mount Snow. It should have a bustling market for vacation homes. However, the combination of poor cellular coverage and low internet availability along Route 100 has made it difficult for people to sell houses there. Meanwhile, just nine miles away in Town, a community that invested heavily in broadband and cellular infrastructure, the real estate market is faring much better.

Chavez points out that real-estate values are determined by a variety of factors, and other considerations can trump lack of broadband. A good example, he says, is in Washington County, where the strength of the real estate market is due to the number of state workers who want to live there. Still, many houses outside of downtown Montpelier and Barre have poor internet service.

Chavez discovered as much himself when he moved to Vernon from New Mexico four years ago. He says he was shocked to find that his internet speeds were terrible in East Montpelier, where he had purchased a house.

"I don't even bother to try to work at home anymore. I just drive to the office," he says. "Luckily, I'm only seven minutes away."

According to Chavez, one common variable in the price point of the home itself: If it's a home in the \$300,000 to \$3 million range in, say, Manchester or Stowe, it's likely that the sellers have invested "whatever

it takes" to get high-speed internet. Sellers who haven't done that are most likely to run into trouble with \$300,000 to \$300,000 homes between Stowe and Jay Peak "in the middle of nowhere." Though rural buyers typically don't expect high-speed internet connections, high-speed homes can be challenging to sell if they have both poor internet and spotty cellphone coverage. (According to Poore, 85 percent of Americans now access the internet through mobile devices.)

"That's an issue where selling point than the broadband," Chavez asserts. "There are places that you just can't get a cellphone signal, and that can be a serious deal killer, because potential buyers see it as a safety issue."

For her part, Streett hasn't had clients whose homes sit unsold for years because they couldn't pass the "Netflix test," i.e., streaming movie online without constant buffering. But she does know of someone who sold a house for sale off the grid in the Green Mountain National Forest, with no likelihood of ever having electricity, cable or sound internet.

"The house was half a mile from the north face of Mount Snow," she says. "These people had the fastest cell and [internet] service. It was amazing! That's how it sold!"

Contact: ken@newengr.com

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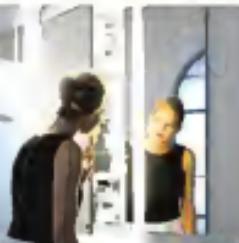
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To review the latest statewide map of broadband coverage, visit vtBroadband.org.



Clean & Green

Vermont Soap has a formula for cleaning homes the nontoxic way.

BY RENE PICARD

The curing room in Vermont Soap's manufacturing facility in Middlebury may be one of the most fragrant spots in Vermont. As dozens of soap bars cure on drying racks like aging craft cheeses, the air is laden with the rich aromas of pine, peppermint, lavender, lemongrass and other essential oils.

But, unlike the scents added to most conventionally produced soaps, shampoos, toiletries and home-cleaning products, none of these odours comes from artificial chemicals or toxic ingredients. In fact, the earthy reddish hue of some of the bars is derived from lobster shells.

Vermont Soap, whose unofficial slogan as "logrolling packy stuff with yester-stuff," specializes in foaming bath, organic and tonic home and garden products. These include castile soaps, deodorants, oral-care products, aftershave creams, pet and horse shampoos, surface cleaners, fruit and vegetable washes, car cleaners, and even yogi-eat cleaners. Many are U.S. Department of Agriculture-certified

organics, and all are safe and nontoxic. That makes them ideal for consumers with severe allergies or chemical sensitivities, or those who simply have concerns about the prevalence of hazardous materials in the home.

Larry Pleasant, 32, founded Vermont Soap in 1993, after he'd learned the hard way what those chemicals can do to your body. In the 1980s, Pleasant earned money for college working as a Burlington window washer. In an effort to economize, he concocted his own window-washing solution consisting of

For about eight years, Pleasant annually coated himself in noxious chemicals such as sodium borate, sulfuric

mechanical and ethylene glycol, which left him with severe contact dermatitis and multiple chemical sensitivities. Conventional deodorants give him rashes across his arms and torso that last for weeks. Normal shampoos caused his hair to fall out.

He tried one conventional brand after another, but the problems never went away. By 2001, Pleasant's "resilient body" was so sensitive, he couldn't touch or be around artificial scents, artificial colors or petrochemical products.

Then, one day at a Vermont craft fair, Pleasant picked up a bar of soap made with goat's milk. Just days after he tried it, his eight-year bout of dermatitis disappeared. Pleasant had countless other

consumers must suffer from similar sensitivities. Present decided to turn his disability into a business venture. Thus Vermont Soap was born.

Of course, Vermont Soap isn't the only producer of eco-friendly home-cleaning and personal-care products in the Green Mountain State. According to *Forbes* magazine, Burlington behemoth Seventh Generation does more than \$300 million in annual retail sales.

While Vermont Soap hasn't reached that level, it's growing quickly as more consumers seek products labeled organic. The company now has 25 employees and sales in excess of \$1 million annually; it recently expanded into Asia and is exploring new markets in Europe. Two-thirds of Vermont Soap's products

are now sold under other labels or are added to ingredients to other products.

A June 2005 fire in Vermont Soap's factory on Middlebury's Exchange Street shut down operations for four months but ultimately proved fortuitous. It forced a move into a manufacturing facility more than twice as large just down the road. The company still maintains a discount retail outlet at its original location. There, consumers can find deals on Vermont Soap products and visit its modest soap museum, which features antique soaping machines, shaving kits, classic soapers and, of course, old soaps.

In accordance with Pleasant's goal of "doing as little harm as possible," his new and much larger manufacturing space is all electric and is or near zero-emission. Reheating that might expose his employees to pesticides and other allergens, he recently planted vegetable gardens for himself and his coworkers who typically buy organic meats and produce online at Vermont Soap for similarly nongmo alternatives to familiar cleaning products. For example, Produce Magic is an organic cleaner that removes waxes, pesticides, and other dirt and residue from fruits and vegetables. Green Gar is an aromatic cleaner similar to Arm & Hammer's certified organic and contains no petrochemicals.

Liquid Sunshine is an all-purpose spray-and-wipe surface cleaner and concentrate similar to Clorox Bleach but it contains all-natural citrus oils. According to Pleasant, it can be used safely on electronics, woodwork and bathroom floors, just like Murphy's Oil Soap, but it's nontoxic and easy on your hands.

Jessie Lincoln, owner of Bondy's Books & Bakery in Middlebury, sells organic baked goods and says she

uses only Liquid Sunshine on all her counters, glass surfaces, prep tables and dishes.

"So many chemicals on the market leave a chemical, toxic smell behind," she says. "Liquid Sunshine has a really clean aroma that our customers love."

In 2004, *Resilient Living* magazine gave Liquid Sunshine its Editor's Choice Award, noting that the household cleaner "contains no volatile organic compounds, which can irritate eyes and cause headaches."

"It is possible to fall in love with a household cleaner!" writes managing editor Jeanne Blomfield. "If it's certified organic, non-toxic and made with a mere five ingredients, it is."

Many of Vermont Soap's customers suffer from asthma or

chemical sensitivities or have compromised immune systems due to chemotherapy and other medical conditions. Over the years, some have reached out to Pleasant to seek his advice or thank him for the products he's created.

In response, Pleasant published a free, downloadable six-page book, *The Resilient Body Handbook*, which instructs people with chemical sensitivities, asthma and other environmental triggers on how to become a "Sherlock Holmes to oneself: the mysteries of your own body."

"One of the first comments I ever got on our website was from a woman who wrote, 'Thank goodness you wrote this, Larry. I thought it was the only one.' He says, 'You're not. There are millions of us.'

Contact: jlm@vermontsoap.com

MANY OF VERMONT SOAP'S CUSTOMERS SUFFER FROM ASTHMA OR CHEMICAL SENSITIVITIES OR HAVE COMPROMISED IMMUNE SYSTEMS DUE TO CHEMOTHERAPY AND OTHER MEDICAL CONDITIONS.

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Branching Out

*Horticulturist
Michael Dodge has
a thing for willows*

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You might think of willows as the weeping kind, with their cascading branches that fall to the ground. Or you might picture a pussy willow, with its kitten-paw buds soft to the touch and pretty to display. For the average person — and even many seasoned gardeners — the willow savvy stops there.

Not far Michael Dodge. The owner of Vermont Willow Nursery in Fairfield has about 300 different types of willow trees and shrubs on his property. Over a decade, Dodge has planted all but a few limestone outcrops there himself.

A professional hornbeamplanter who scouted at the famed New Garden outside London, Dodge is perhaps the most knowledgeable willow man in New England. Growers and botanists nationwide know of him, and customers in nearly every state have bought his cuttings — starting at a minimum order of 10 for \$25. This spring alone, the nursery filled nearly 400 orders.

"The culmination of all my horticultural training has ended up with willows," Beale says. "I was able to focus on a plant that I've discovered very few people know anything about."

Semiriched at age 74, Dodge steals through his nursery, tickling off both the common and scarcefaced names of earth's yellow and pasturing cat-sitting features. Cost flower, usually found in Europe and Asia, has leaves that start out golden in color and tails of flowers that resemble caterpillars. Setae candle with sage-green leaves; it is native to Vermont. Another yellow with yellowish stony green from cottage Dodge took from a tree along Interstate 80 He

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Branching Out

has a big elderberry willow — used to make, yes, cricket bats in England.

The diversity of the trees fascinates Dodge. "I could spend the rest of my life [exploring them], and I wouldn't do more than scratch the surface," he says.

Willows are on the Salicis genus — part of the Salicaceae family of plants — which includes more than 450 native species and more than 1,000 cultivated varieties and hybrids. Some willows stand tall and slender and sway in the breeze. Others squat close to the ground, their leaves a dusty gray-green. Red early willow has twisted branches that turn red in summer. The leaves of the woolly willow — or *Salix lanata*, one of Dodge's最爱 — look like little clusters of rosebuds. Schweinitz's willow seems to sparkle in its leaves, with silver-white backlights, rustle in the wind.

Dodge loves to discover new willows and track down rarely seen ones. In 2014, he led a small expedition to Mount Adirondack in New Hampshire to see a native species that stands just an inch tall.

Yuliya Krasnolutka, associate professor of ornamental horticulture and a willow expert at the University of Connecticut, joined that trip. She says Dodge, who had contacted her a few years earlier to discuss a willow issue, has an impressive level of experience and connection with willow growers across the country.

"Plus, he's extremely enthusiastic about willows." Krasnolutka adds, "His enthusiasm has given him so much information."

Dodge grew up in the Lake District of England and trained helping his mother in the garden at an early age. In 1964, after training at the Royal Botanic Garden Kew, he boarded the Queen Mary I and sailed to the United States to take a job at the New York Botanical Garden. Later, he spent his time at White Flower Farm in Litchfield, Conn., working as a horticultural photographer and gardener.

Dodge and his wife, Soma, a real estate agent, moved to Vermont in late 2006, after she was diagnosed with breast cancer; to live closer to her daughter, he says. (Soma is now in remission.) They found a tattered, blue-shingled 1830 house at the end of a dirt road, perched on nearly 50 acres of rolling hillsides and framed by large maple trees. He and Soma loaded a U-Haul with shrubs and perennials that had planned in Connecticut and drove north.

The previous owners of their property kept lots of animals, which enriched the soil, Dodge notes. Vermont's notorious randomness presents digging more than three or four feet deep, but

the constant flow of water down the slope and along the hill renders the soil moist and loamy, he says.

That and Dodge's green thumb have helped to turn his property into a plant lover's paradise. A bright-yellow arch of double-flowered hydrangea the hill in springtime. In a low spot behind the house, he created a bistro terrace lined with rocks and lined it with hostas, peony and iris. Arpington and garlic mustard in a



THE MORE I LEARNED ABOUT THEM, THE MORE CHALLENGING IT WAS.

MICHAEL DODGE

vegetable garden in early spring. Nearby are raspberry, blueberry and blackberry bushes. Among the willows stand a chestnut and elderberry tree, pear and plum trees, and dozens of apple trees.

Ironically, Dodge paid little attention to willows in his 40-plus years as a horticulturist, though the trees are popular in England. In 2006, soon after moving to Vermont, he visited the Montreal Botanical Garden and saw a demonstration of living structures. It included a "hedge" — a cross between a fence and a hedge — made with willow branches and rods.

Strange yet bendable, willow rods are used for structures all over the world, including the Wiedenstadt (Willow Chip) in Germany that inspired Dodge to get Dodge hooked on willows. "The usefulness of them," he says. "They're so flexible."

A few months later, while back in England to visit his mom, he stopped at several willow nurseries and met "the warmest people" who gravitate to willow. Having returned to Vermont, Dodge bought his first cutting of about 10 cuttings at a flower show; then placed a large order with a Kentish dealer.

"I had no idea what I was doing at that point," Dodge says. "I just wanted more willows."

The plants cooperated. Dodge says you can eat any willow rod in the ground, and it will grow.

As he collected more and more willows and photographed them, friends suggested he put up a website and start a business, which he did in 2014. "We made \$100 sales in our first year," Dodge recalls.

In the wide world of willows, this gardener soon discovered, many species and cultivars in nurseries and public gardens are mislabelled or misspelled. Dodge immerses himself in research, studying the trees' characteristics and talking to experts everywhere. He has grown adept at finding and correcting willows with mistakes identified.

"The more I learned about them, the more challenging it was," he says.

Last year, he got embroiled in a big willow hullabaloo over the use of the wrong name for a group of popular Japanese pussy willows with red buds. Many nurseries were selling these willows under the label of a similar-looking but different species, Dodge explains.

This past April, Dodge helped Krasnolutka publish a paper with a New Genetics colleague in the journal *Biotecnica, resolving the mystery of the misnamed pussy willow*. Krasnolutka has a long list of other incorrect willow designations that she hopes to tackle with Dodge, she says.

"He has a good eye," she observes. "He is excellent in detection of the problem of species names."

Dodge has consulted with botanical gardens around the country to identify unnamed or improperly named willows. "There's a lot of fun there had doing investigative work into those names," he says.

A less enjoyable willow challenge is his battle against a gaukane-sae, shiny black beetle that has infested Dodge's crop. The natural pesticide he has tried seems to work on some plants but not others.

Dodge also has to fend off disease and hungry rabbits. And now that he has expanded his nursery in a second plot in a lower-lying area, he needs to find a way to divert the excess water.

Willow creates demands much of time and attention, Dodge cautions.

"It's a real sacrifice, come if gets to you," he says with a smile. "But, you know, I've never been happier doing anything."

INFO

Mountain Willow Nursery, 52 Ridge Road North, Fairfield, Vermont; mountainwillow.com

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House Hunt!

Following first-time buyers on the search for their dream homes

BY CAROLYN FOX

If you've been through the process, you know there's a learning curve, complete with near misses, drama and mystifying paperwork along the way. If you're starting to think about getting out of that rental and buying your own home, our House Hunters just might have some eye-opening tips for you.



CLOSING TIME: The McLellans Find Their Home

In the last issue of *Nest*, we introduced you to Sarah and Sam McLellan, two thirty-something whiz kids who'd recently moved to Burlington from Boston. Their house hunt started out in a leisurely manner, but full hot kinetics into high gear by winter, when the couple learned they were expecting a baby boy.

At the end of January, the couple offer an off-the-grid North End home — just under the asking price — was accepted, with a caveat: The owners wouldn't close until they found suitable housing, which left Sarah and Sam in the lurch with a baby due in July. Since staying in their rental apartment with a newborn wasn't a viable option, they continued to look at other homes while closing their fingers that this one would work out in time.

Good news: After being under contract since January, the McLellans finally had a closing date on the original house — June 26. Or, as Sarah put it, "two weeks before the new human comes!"

"Not necessarily being sure that this was going to happen was the hardest part," she reported. "We saw some other houses in the meantime, but it was hard to get behind another house with this one waiting."

Not to mention the fact that more homes came on the market in springtime, and there was much more competition for them — which, Sarah said, meant bidding wars and higher

selling prices. "It was April 1, and it was just like, 'here.' The market is actually in existence," she recalled.

So after "a very long process of just waiting and waiting and waiting," the house [was] such a relief," she said. They got the happy news just as Sam had started devising a backup plan to spend the summer in Boston with their families.

The home, on George Street, has three bedrooms, one bath, a front porch and a small back yard. "The house is so cute and little and perfect in its location," said Sarah, whose main priorities were walkability to downtown and resale value. (She and Sam expect to return to Boston in a few years.) The fact that the nearby Burlington Town Center will be going to be redeveloped will probably be a good selling point in the future, she noted.

For now, though, they'll be making the place their own. "We're hoping to spruce up the backyard," Sarah



As thanks for sharing their story with *Nest*, we're giving the McLellans a housewarming present: a four-hour home design consultation and \$100 gift certificate from Steven Kitchen Bath & Interiors.

Explained, "maybe add a couple checkmarks and some raised beds." They plan to fence in the yard and do an energy audit, replacing all the windows and the front door before winter. And, since the house dates back to the 1860s, they're going to make sure lead paint isn't an issue.

"It's all a little daunting right now," admitted the mom-to-be, so her parents will be coming to help them settle in — "because," she joked, "family is first!"

Best of all, she and Sam will be able to give the new grandparents a place to stay over the summer as they get to know the newest member of the family. Congrats, McLellans!

MOVING ON:

James Q. Leaves Vermont

Not far from his house in Burlington, James Q. of Burlington has finally moved — but not to where he planned.

The twenty-something health care IT consultant, who spent more than a year searching for a Burlington-area duplex, is leaving the Green Mountain State for greener pastures. In his case, that's central Massachusetts. He's started a new job there, and his girlfriend will be working and attending grad school.

"Our plan to stay in Vermont were thwarted by the low salary/high real estate prices," James wrote in an email. "The value matrix of Burlington is heavily skewed. I saw a home in the South End last year go for \$345,000. It was on one-acre of an acre, had no garage and was on state foundation.... I know everybody plays the student loan card, but how are you supposed to save up for 5 percent of \$345,000, which equals \$17,250 and change, when you need to shell out \$4800 to \$6000 in student loan payments a month, per person?"

"We really didn't have a choice when we sat down and looked at the numbers," he continued. "Both of us love Vermont, and it was tough to leave so soon, but you kind of need to do what you need to do, you know?"

When asked if he felt he was sacrificing Vermont's much-touted high quality of life, James countered, "There's plenty of nice places to live in New England." He's found that he can make more money in Massachusetts while maintaining the same price point and real estate expectations. And as a bonus, he reported wryly, "there's lots of parks, lakes and even more."



JAMES Q. LEAVES VERMONT

BETH & JAMES

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Backyard Tree House

BY MEGAN JAMES

Jason Mikula was obsessed. For one month in the summer of 2014, the father of two could think of little else besides finishing the tree house in his Killington backyard. When his wife, Polly, asked him what he wanted to do after work each night that July, he'd reply incredulously, "What do you mean? I'm working on the tree house."

He had good reason to hustle. He was building the structure for his kids, Emery, 8, and Sam, 6, who live with their mother in Denver, Colo. He visits them regularly, but at the end of that month, they were coming to stay with him and Polly for the first time.

Jason knows carpentry basics, but had never built a tree house. He and Polly scoured Pinterest for inspiration, and their final plan included a zip line and a hammock. They ordered a bunch of pressure-treated wood and got to work.

There were mishaps. They initially selected three trees to build the house in, only to discover when one collapsed just days before they began construction, that all of them were dead. Jason

learned the hard way that it's foolish to attempt to hang a zip line by yourself (especially late at night, after a full day with your wife, when, believe it or not, you're still holding on a wobbly ladder in the dark).

He also worried about the project's structural integrity. "I had nightmares that Sam was going to be in the harnesses and that whole thing was going to fall down on him," Jason admits. "That's why we did bring a professional just to look at it and tell us if it wasn't going to fall over."

What the Mikulas putted onto their driveway on the first night of Emery and Sam's visit, "they jumped out of the car and ran up to [the tree house]," recalls Jason. "They were blissing on the zip line until 10 at night."



Best: Jason Mikula
Mikula's tree house
Kids: Daughter Emery, 8,
and son Sam, 6

Dwelling Deets

- The treehouse includes climbing walls, a fire, hammocks and a hammock swing, plus a zip line connecting the treehouse to the ground.
- Jason's parents helped him build the bridge and decorated the interior of the treehouse with deer head posters, a baseball-shaped
- bulletin board and doilies, creating a-up camping photos.
- Mikula built his treehouse in just under two hours. He even took a break to pick up the kids, Polly's sister and brother-in-law, and went to a wedding.

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STORY AND PHOTO BY LAURIE PAULI

Longer days and warmer nights mean that outdoor dining season is finally here. Whether that means leisurely evenings on the patio feasting with family or friends, or just a moment of Zen with a cocktail and a sunset, we look for any excuse to stay outside during these precious few months of summer.

Unfortunately, mosquitoes are out there, too, and dusk to peak time for them to be looking for their next meal. In other words, they're on the patio at the same time we are. Of course, you could pick up some commercial citronella candles. Or you could make your own.

Some minimal internet searching for do-it-yourself mosquito repellent led me to a wine bottle tiki torch. It's an inexpensive and straightforward project that promises to solve my bug problem and provide some warm, fiery light.



WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Empty, clean glass bottle — it doesn't have to be wine bottle. You might use a pretty liquor bottle or something else with a narrow mouth.

Half-inch coupling — the little piece of hardware used to connect garden hoses. This helps to keep the wick in place.

Tiki torch replacement wick

Citronella tincture fluid — this natural mosquito repellent works by masking human smell; it also confuses the bugs when they fly into the smoke.

Small pebbles or stones (optional)

Decorative rope (optional)

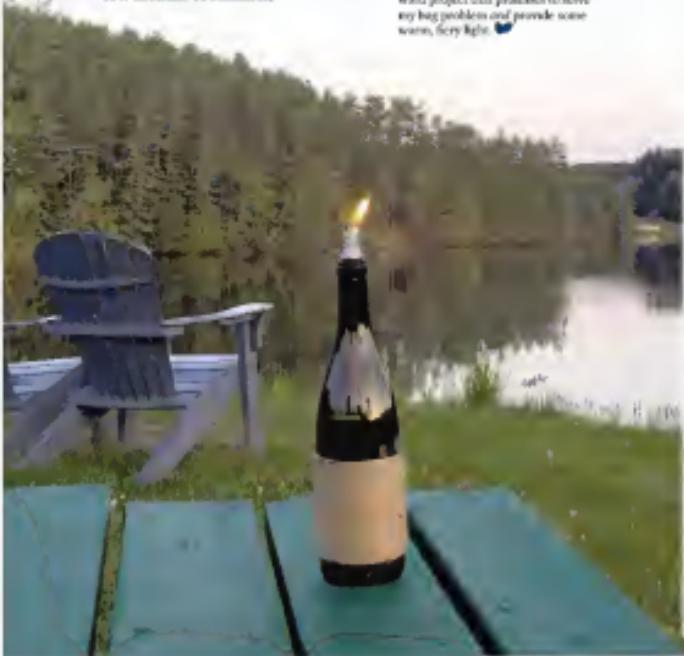
INSTRUCTIONS:

First, I'll fill the bottle about halfway with small stones if you have them. This reduces the amount of fuel you will need to fill the bottle. You can leave the outside of the bottle as is or you can decorate it. I experimented with wrapping a thin piece of tape around the bottom portion of the bottle. The tape can be secured with wood glue or a hot glue gun.

Using a funnel — or a very steady hand — pour the citronella torch fuel into the wine bottle until it's about three-fourths full. Insert the coupling into the bottle and then insert your wick. Wait at least 30 minutes before lighting (because that the wick has become saturated with fuel).

Then sit back and enjoy your evening without those little flying friends. Use caution around children.

Laurie Pauli is an architect and interior designer in White River Junction. lauriepauli.com



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